

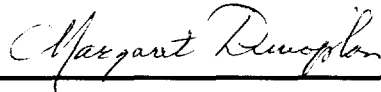
ENDGAME

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Jeff D. Ackenback

Margaret Dimoplon



Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

December 2000

May 2001

LD
2489
.Z4
2000
.A25

In loving memory of
Ray L. Murphy
1918-1998

We will never forget you "Papaw."
I hope I've made you proud.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	I
Acknowledgments	ii
Endgame	1
Alternate Ending.....	56
Original Two-Page Story.....	60
First Short Story Version	62

Abstract

I first came up with the idea for “Endgame” with a simple assignment in my AP English class, my senior year in high school. The assignment was simple. Mr. Blythe gave us three words, “I went back,” and told us to write two pages, beginning with those words. I wrote a two page science fiction story, which I titled “Endgame.” A few years later, in Eng. 405, I went back to those two pages to change and expand them into a 12 - page short story. At the time, I had no idea that the story would eventually evolve into the 55-page novella that I wrote for my Honors thesis.

The story revolves around a central cast of about three or four characters, including the main character Dante Smith. Dante, who is plagued by visions and the seizures that accompany them, soon finds out that his entire life has been basically leading to one thing--stopping, or trying to stop an alien invasion of Earth. The supporting characters, his wife, the CIA agent, his brother, and to some extent his deceased father, both aid and hinder Dante as he risks everything for something he never dreamed would involve him.

When I reached the end of my tale, I realized that I didn’t know exactly how I wanted to end it. Would he live to tell about his mission, or would he sacrifice himself for everyone he loves? After a great amount of time asking my friends and family, I finally decided on an ending. However, I didn’t want the alternate ending to go untold, so I have also written it and attached it to this project. I had a lot of fun finally getting a chance to write a complete “Endgame,” but now I realize I don’t want it to end here. Hopefully soon, I plan on transforming this novella into a script, which will hopefully someday lead to a final produced version.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Margaret Dimoplon, my thesis advisor, who not only gave me the chance and the desire to write “Endgame” as a short story, but also encouraged me and helped me through the process of developing it into a novella. Thanks to my roommates and friends for always showing interest as I constantly bombarded them with my ideas. Thanks also to all the rest of my friends and family who have helped and supported me through this entire process. The list is too long to name off here, but you know who you are, and I want you to know that I probably couldn’t have done it without you. Last but definitely not least, I would like to give thanks to God, who not only provided me with the means to have the ideas, but also the ability to carry through on them.

Jeff Ackenback

Fall 2000

ENDGAME

“The time is coming, and things will never be the same again. This is not a dream. Everything you see and feel will be quite real, and there is nothing you can do to stop it. The end is inevitable.”

* * *

“John, it happened again. I’m worried. It’s the same thing every day. He is normal one moment, and the next his eyes roll back and he collapses,” Gwen said into the phone. “Wait, I think I hear him coming, so I should let you go. I really think you should come out here and check on him, though...soon.”

Gwen hung up the phone and walked towards the bedroom, where minutes earlier she had watched her husband collapse on the bed. She watched as Dante slowly picked himself up out of bed, nodded in her direction and crept to the bathroom, shutting the door behind him. She tried to remember what their lives were like before he started having these problems, but it was getting increasingly difficult. Dante came out of the bathroom and walked towards her. The glimmer was gone from his light blue eyes. The smile and laugh that had played a part in her attraction to him was now replaced with a worried, and sometimes pained, expression. Before he could speak, she reached up, standing on her tiptoes, and kissed him softly on the lips. He looked down, reading the expression on her face, and gave her the biggest smile he could manage.

“Gwen, I know you’re worried. I am, too. I don’t know what’s happening to me. The visions are tearing me apart inside. They’re always intense, but this time...this time was different,” Dante Smith said. “This time I heard a voice.”

Dante pulled away from Gwen and turned around, visibly shaken. He ran his hand through his black hair, and then along his goatee, which was something he always did while thinking. His mind was racing with the images from the visions. He hadn’t shared those visions with anyone, not even Gwen. He had mentioned that he had been having intense dreams during the periods he was unconscious, but he hadn’t gotten specific.

“Gwen, I think I’m ready to tell you everything that’s been happening to me,” Dante said, as he walked back to her and ran his fingers through her silky blonde hair. “You need to sit down, though.”

“I’m ready, honey. We can work through this together. Everything will be all right,” Gwen said.

“I think it will be easier if I just get right to the point. In the visions, I see...I...I see...the moon...”

Dante’s confession was interrupted by another vision. He slammed his hands onto the sides of his head and screamed. Gwen watched as his eyes once again rolled back, and he collapsed on the bed. She leaped to the phone and quickly dialed 911. As she heard the sirens blaring up the street, she quickly made another call, and then rode with her ailing husband to the emergency room.

* * *

After he received the latest news on Dante Smith's condition from Gwen, Special Agent John Dawson decided that it was time for him to take a more direct course of action. Dawson, who had been an integral part of the CIA for more than 20 years, considered Dante to be his best friend. That was the main reason he had remained uninvolved until absolutely necessary. Dawson wiped his hands across his face, which had been aged both by time and by more crisis situations than he cared to count, and pressed down softly on the intercom button.

"Donna, I need you to cancel all my appointments. There is a situation in Miami that needs my full attention. I'll be leaving immediately."

Dawson looked down at his desk and picked up a picture frame.

"Well, Conner, you always said it was coming. I only wish you were alive to help me through what must be done. The only bright spot is that you helped to prepare in case it ever came down to this."

Dawson sighed and took the back off of the frame, revealing a small envelope taped to the back of the picture. The envelope was about the size of a business card and had something written on the back. Dawson sat and looked at the envelope and then once more at the picture. He sighed to himself and left the office to catch his flight to Miami.

* * *

Laughter filled the cold, metallic ship as it soared majestically through the universe. The laughter, though, came only from one man. The man stood on a platform and looked at a gigantic three-dimensional map of the Milky Way Galaxy. He watched the floor below as a group of slightly larger than human creatures scurried about and performed their various tasks. One of the larger creatures stopped, and used its pupilless

eyes to shoot a threatening gaze towards the imposing figure that watched them. It shot out its six-foot long tongue and licked its large, sharp teeth. The figure caught the glance and laughed loudly, with a confidence one wouldn't expect from someone in that situation. The creature dropped the heavy load it was carrying and leapt up three levels directly at the figure, who, still laughing, calmly reached out and grabbed the creature by the rough, cold black skin of its throat. He took hold of the creature's tongue, ripped it out and threw it over the ledge. The creatures below watched as the figure tightened his grip and lifted the creature's head off its body.

"Never forget your place here. Never forget who I am," said the mysterious figure, as he tossed the creature's head aside and walked out of the room, still laughing.

* * *

"Where...where am I?" asked Dante, finally regaining consciousness and not recognizing his sterile surroundings.

"Shhh. Don't over-exert yourself, honey. We're at the hospital," said Gwen. "You've been unconscious for almost 24 hours."

"Well, I'm fine now. We have to go. I have to get ahold of...someone."

"Dante, you can't just leave the hospital. They have to run more tests on you. I want to know why all this is happening. Besides...I already called John. He'll be here."

"But...I need to leave. I promise I'll explain it to you. Will you please see if there's a way for me to get out of here?"

"Fine. I'll go ask around, but I'm not promising anything," Gwen said, kissing Dante on the forehead and walking out the door.

Dante knew that she was going to the cafeteria, and then would come back and tell him that there was nothing she could do. He needed some time to think. He knew that if he could just talk to John, they could figure everything out together. Waiting for Gwen to return, he thought about the times that John and he had been in life-threatening situations. When Dante was working his way through Princeton, it was John who was ever present as a friend to talk to. At the time, Dante hadn't known that John was in the CIA, or how that would impact his own life. After Dante graduated from Princeton with honors and degrees in English and Theatre and a minor in Biochemistry, John introduced him to his niece, Gwendolyne Parker, and used his influence from years of experience in the CIA to get Dante a position with the FBI. Through hard work and an excellent case record, Dante quickly became one of the preeminent agents within the FBI ranks, and even worked a few cases with John as part of a special joint task force assigned to infiltrate Iraq and retrieve a top secret stolen military weapon. Shortly after his successful return, Dante proposed to and married Gwen. Dante remembered John's disappointment when he resigned from the FBI, in order to pursue a career in teaching on the college level, as well as occasional acting jobs. Even though he hated hurting John's feelings, he felt that was the only way to give his wife a normal life.

"What's wrong? Is it happening again?" said Gwen, appearing at the door.

"No...not this time. I was just reminiscing. Well...what's the verdict?"

"They want you to stay in for observation. Sorry...I tried," Gwen said, avoiding eye contact.

Dante smiled and pulled her close to kiss her. He knew that he would get out soon, and he didn't really see the point in arguing over it now. When Dante reached to kiss Gwen again, she pulled away with a strange look on her face.

"Dante, I want to know what is happening. You were about to say something earlier...before this...something about the moon. What was it?"

The smile on Dante's face was immediately replaced with a serious, pained expression. He shut his eyes, rubbed his hands across his goatee and swallowed.

"I'm not crazy. This is going to sound crazy, but you have to believe me. I can't explain everything. I don't know why I'm having these...seizures...but I do know that I'm having visions. The visions are so intense and horrifying...so...horrible. I'm not sure you should have to be a part of this."

"That's not your choice to make. I knew you were different from the first time I met you. The only thing that changed when you quit the FBI was your job. You have always been the same man with the same worries and problems," Gwen sat down on the edge of the bed and softly caressed Dante's hand. "I made a promise to be with you for better or worse, so talk."

"I guess you're right. You do have a right to know. Over the past few weeks, I've been having incredibly realistic visions of...of the future. Everything is destroyed. I see piles of bodies being burned in the street. I see toppled buildings and explosions filling the air and the streets. Those are always the constants, but the past few have been slightly different. I've seen more."

“No wonder you’ve been acting so different lately. The strain of seeing all that death...all that destruction...it’s no wonder you wound up in the hospital,” Gwen interrupted.

“That’s not all. In the last two, I haven’t just seen, but I’ve heard, too...heard a voice. I don’t know who it belongs to, but I know that it is speaking to me, warning me...no...threatening me. In the last vision, I almost saw the face of the person it belongs to, but he wouldn’t step out of the shadows. I saw him kill, though. He murdered a...a creature of some type, an alien, maybe, in cold blood.”

“That, my friend, is why we must leave immediately,” came a voice from the doorway.

Dante and Gwen both turned to see who had walked in and interrupted. Gwen stood up and rushed to the figure in the doorway and threw her arms around him.

“John! Thank you so much for coming when I asked you to. I know you’re busy, but...” Gwen said.

“I didn’t come just because you requested me, Gwendolyne. I came because Dante’s entire life has built to this moment...to what is coming,” John Dawson said. “I have filed the appropriate paper work, Dante. You are free to leave this place and come with me. We have a lot to do.”

“What are you talking about? You seem to know an awful lot more about this than even I do. What’s going on?” Dante said.

“I’ll explain it all soon. Now, hurry and dress. We can’t waste any more time than we already have. I have something I must retrieve from NASA. Take Gwen home and wait for me there.”

Dante nodded his head as John walked out of the room. Gwen and Dante exchanged a worried glance, before Dante slowly rolled out of bed and walked to the shelf that held his clothes.

* * *

Dante opened the door to his closet upstairs, while Gwen passed the time downstairs making tea in the kitchen. It had taken them less than half an hour to leave the hospital and arrive home. Dante, in an attempt to pass the time until John arrived, carefully went through a small drawer in the very back of the closet. The door had not been opened for years, and Dante had hoped never to look in it again. He pulled out a small necklace with a spider on it and stared at it. It had been a wedding gift from John, mostly meant as a joke. Dante had always been terrified of any kind of spider, but held a strange admiration for Spider-Man; John never failed to point out the irony in the situation. He smiled and put the necklace around his neck and tucked it into his plain black T-shirt. The next thing he came across in the drawer was a revolver and holster, which he attached to his shirt. Then, out of the corner of his eye, Dante noticed a box in the corner marked 'junk.' He closed the drawer and opened the box. Going through the box he came across his old Cincinnati Reds baseball jersey, buried beneath the piles of batteries, old papers, never-read books, and other items that had outlived their usefulness. He remembered buying it during his freshman year of college and wearing it about twice a week or more throughout his college years. He picked it up out of the box, smiled, shook all the wrinkles out of it, and carefully put it on.

"I can't believe you found that thing. I remember you used to do everything but bathe in that thing," Gwen said from the doorway.

“Hey, it’s my lucky shirt, and I think I’m going to need some luck now,” Dante said, walking over to his wife. “Besides, you know it makes me look sexy.”

Gwen laughed and reached up to kiss her husband, “Yeah, well, don’t be getting any ideas right now. John’s here. He’s downstairs in the living room with a briefcase, and he doesn’t look very calm.”

“Well, I’d better not keep him waiting any more then, princess,” Dante said, kissing his wife. “I want to find out what he knows about all of this, and why it’s happening to me in the first place.”

Dante held Gwen close for a moment, and then turned around and left the room. As he walked down the stairs, he could hear John talking on the phone. He stopped just before he entered the living room and listened to John’s end of the conversation. He couldn’t make out much, but did notice his name being mentioned. Dante cleared his throat, in order to let John know he was standing there, and walked into the room. John quickly hung up the phone and sat down across from Dante at a small table in the center of the room.

“Well, John, I’m pretty sure you weren’t ordering a pizza...so what was that phone call about?”

“I was discussing our current situation with...a friend. The call, however, is not something we need to discuss...yet,” John said. “Right now, you need to tell me exactly what’s been happening so that I can figure out how far along we are.”

“What do you mean ‘how far along we are?’ What are you talking about? I think you need to tell me what you know, and don’t leave anything out.”

“Very well, if you would rather hear my end of the story first, that’s fine. You won’t like what you hear, though,” John said, opening his briefcase and pulling out a file. “Before I tell you what I know, you need to look over this.”

Dante took the file. It was marked ‘Top Secret - Highest Security Clearance.’ He looked up at John, who matched Dante’s questioning glance with a nod and a deep sigh. Dante slowly opened the file and read over the first page. It was a summary of a secret NASA mission that involved Dante’s father, Conner Smith. Dante remembered his dad telling him about his short stint as an astronaut, but he had never mentioned anything about this. Dante decided to save all his questions for the end, because he had a bad feeling that he would have a lot more. His misgivings were unfortunately proven right with the next page. He rubbed his eyes in disbelief as he gazed upon a photograph of one of the creatures he had seen in his last vision. The only difference was that it was much smaller, perhaps an indication of its age. The next page revealed a picture of a large space ship. It was rounded and spherical in the front, but eventually gave way to straight lines and a strange triangle shaped tail. He had never seen a ship like this before, but the markings showed it was a NASA designed craft. The final few pages focused on Dante himself. According to the paperwork, he wasn’t as normal as he had always believed. He closed the file and shot a desperate glance towards John for answers.

“John, what’s going on? That...thing...I saw one in one of my visions...what is it? Where did it come from? How does my father’s mission fit into all this?”

“I’m afraid if I tell you all of the answers you seek, then you may never have a normal life again. There is no way you can escape what will happen once you know everything.” John said cryptically.

“Do you think I have a normal life right now? I live every day afraid that one of these seizures that accompany after the visions will end my life and leave Gwen alone. I want to know. No, I need to know everything.”

“Then you will. First, I want you to forget every rumor and all the misinformed prattle about Area 51 and aliens landing on Earth. That ‘creature’ you saw in the picture...it didn’t land here...so to speak,” John paused, noticeably shaken. “Shortly before your birth, 10 months to be exact, your father, Conner, took part in a top secret mission for NASA to test a new spacecraft with warping technology. No one, other than those directly involved, knew anything about this. We didn’t even explain everything to the two astronauts; your father and a young woman named Greta Williams. They were to fly the spacecraft just past the moon, engage the warping technology, and immediately return.”

“Warping technology? What kind of warping technology?” Dante asked.

“Contrary to popular scientific belief, we had developed a way to travel faster than the speed of light. There was a device built into the spacecraft that had the ability to open a small rift in space, a warpzone, and then close it again after the craft went through. Using this technology, the spacecraft could travel nearly anywhere in the universe without the threat of time,” John stopped again and wiped his hands across his eyes. “However, during the test run, we lost contact with the ship for hours. We were about to declare the mission a failure and notify the families of the astronauts, when the warpzone reopened in the same place, and the spacecraft shot through.”

“My father...he almost died testing some stupid technology that you don’t even use now? Did Greta live through it? What about the alien? Did it return with them?”

“Your father...he was a hero. Yes, Greta did live through the mission, but unfortunately not long afterwards. As for the alien, it did return with them, but not in the manner you have surmised. When we reached the spacecraft, both astronauts were unconscious but, physically, in the same shape as before, except we found that Greta was pregnant.” John placed his hand on Dante’s shoulder, but it was immediately brushed off. “She wasn’t pregnant when she went up, so we knew that it couldn’t have been Conner’s child. In a matter of weeks, she gave birth to the ‘creature’ you saw in the picture. Neither of them lived through childbirth, but the creature’s body continued to grow despite its death. We ran every test imaginable on your father and found nothing amiss. As far as we knew, he was completely normal.”

“As far as you knew? You sent him home knowing there could be a chance of something happening to him? What about my mother's safety? What if she had given birth to one of those...oh God. Earlier, you...you said this took place 10 months before I was born. Why did you point that out?” Dante stood up quickly and grabbed John by his coat.

“When you were born, you were physically normal, at least as far as outward appearances went. We arranged for samples of your blood and DNA to be taken without the knowledge of your parents or any of the doctors. We found a strange strand of DNA in your genetic code. There was nothing we could do about it, and it didn’t appear to be causing you any ill effects. In fact, as you grew, it did quite the opposite,” John said, calmly removing himself from Dante’s grip and walking across the room. “During your recent stay at the hospital, we found that your DNA had changed again slightly. I believe that it is somehow related to your visions over the past few weeks.”

Dante caught John's arm as he was walking away, "What you're saying...it means...I'm not...I'm not normal. How could you let me live my life thinking that I had any chance of being normal? That means...the visions...the voice I heard...they're real. Everything is going to end...everyone is going to die..."

"Not necessarily. We had no idea when this day would come, or even if it would come, but many people, including myself, have spent their entire lives preparing for it. No spacecraft have arrived in our vicinity as of yet, but that means we must hurry. There is more I need to tell you, more to prepare you for, but this isn't the place. I have to return these files to my friend at NASA, but after that I'm flying to our base in New Mexico. Area 51."

"I thought you told me to forget everything I've heard about 'Area 51.' Was that a lie, too?" Dante said.

"No, it wasn't a lie. Yes, there is an Area 51...but there are no aliens there. We use it as both a fallback base, and as a place to test new weapons and spacecraft. Everything is below ground and completely undetectable. The 'Area 51' of myths...the sterile, secretive military base surrounded with top security is simply a cover. Nothing important happens at that base, but if we provide a place for people to question, then they are less likely to go looking for one," John said. "You have to come with me, Dante. The only way for you to find your answers...and for us to get through the upcoming disaster...is for you to come with me. I will arrange for a car to pick you up in half an hour to take you to the airport."

"Wait...John...what am I? I need to know...if my life is a lie...if everything I've ever accomplished was a lie...if our friendship was a lie."

John paused, "Dante...I truly am sorry. While it is true that I first made contact with you as a way to keep track of you, our friendship is real. I look at you as a son...and that's why I never told you before. I didn't want to shake up your life just because of a situation that might never happen. We'll get through this...son. I'll see you at the airport, and we will go get the answers together."

Dante nodded and shook John's hand. He watched as John walked out of the house and entered his car. Rubbing his hand over his face, he remembered Gwen and how he had to tell her something, but was afraid to tell her everything. He walked up the stairs and found Gwen still in the bedroom cleaning the closet. He went over to her and held her close. She looked at him with a concerned look and instinctively went to sit on the bed.

"What's wrong, Dante? What did John tell you? Is this all going to be over soon?" Gwen asked, barely holding back the tears.

"There is a lot more to this than what I thought, Gwen. It involves something that happened to my father a long time ago...when he was still an astronaut. I still don't know everything, but I will soon. I'm going to go to New Mexico with John...to a military base...and I should find all the answers there," Dante said. "I want you to go to Tampa and stay with your parents until I get back, okay?"

"Dante, I know you're not telling me everything. I'll accept that for now, but why do I have to leave? Why does John need you and not someone else? You haven't been in the FBI for years..."

"Honey, I can't tell you everything...not yet...it's not safe. You have to stay with your parents, because I don't want to have to worry about you being alone while I'm

gone,” Dante said, slowly caressing Gwen’s hair with one hand and holding her hand with the other. “This isn’t about my being in the FBI...it’s about me. I have to find out...I have to get some things answered. I promise that everything will be okay soon.”

Gwen nodded and Dante pulled her close. The two sat holding each other until a car arrived in front of the house to take Dante to the airport. After a tearful goodbye, and a renewed promise that Gwen would go to her parents’ house, Dante stepped into the car to be ushered closer to his destiny.

* * *

The sky of the small, but densely populated, planet turned black as the immense metallic vessel entered the atmosphere. Crowds of the unnamed planet’s gangly, orange and white inhabitants ran out of their hut-like homes and looked up at the seemingly shapeless spaceship. The spacecraft was spherical on one end, but its rounded edges gave way to straight lines and an indescribable triangle-like tail. Some of the planet’s older inhabitants began to bow and send their praises up to the craft.

On board the ship, the black, scaly creatures hustled back and forth preparing the teleportation area. A shadowy figure stood silent, watching his minions scurry about. He walked towards one of the creatures that was typing instructions into the teleportation console and grabbed it by the arm.

“I want the aliens on this planet obliterated quickly. This is our final step of preparation before we engage the warp engine and move to the Earth’s galaxy.” The figure tightened his grip and lifted the creature up by its arm, “There is no room for failure. Send the invasion force down now.”

The figure released his grip and walked down a small corridor to his chambers, shutting the door behind him. A loud clicking noise emanated from the creature's throat, and thousands of his brethren answered the call and stepped by pairs into the teleportation chamber. The creature flipped a switch on the console and watched the events below on a large three-dimensional area in the center of the room. The invasion was quick and ruthless, sped along because of the peaceful and trusting nature of the planet's inhabitants. Mere minutes after the creatures entered the portal, they returned victorious. Laughter was heard from the figure's chamber as the scans for life showed that there was none remaining.

* * *

Gwen watched from the doorway as the car carrying Dante pulled away from the house. She didn't understand everything that was going on, and she knew that Dante hadn't told her everything. She understood that he was just being protective, though. In fact she was doing the same thing for him, in a way. She closed the door and walked softly towards the bathroom. She silently picked up the small plastic pregnancy test out of the trash and looked at it intently.

"I can't believe it came out positive. Dante, please hurry back. I need you."

* * *

"Well, Dante, I trust the car ride was to your satisfaction?" John said, extending his hand.

"It was fine. Let's get going, John. I want to get this behind me as soon as I can," Dante walked past John's extended hand and seated himself near the back of the plane.

John dropped his head and slowly walked to the cockpit to discuss something with the pilot. Dante didn't want things to be like this between him and John, but at the moment he didn't see how they could be any different. He had just left his wife and his life in Miami to fly across the country to try to stop something that he didn't even fully understand. He watched John move to the back of the plane and sit down next to him as the plane began to take off.

"John, what's going to happen to me? You told me that I have different DNA than normal people, but what exactly does that mean?"

John turned and looked at Dante without answering, and then looked away.

"John? I'm leaving my wife...my life...behind, because you told me I wasn't normal and because you said I was the only possible way out of this. The least you can do is respond to me when I talk to you."

"I don't know, son. I don't have all the answers. That is what this trip is about. There is something at the base that will answer more questions than you probably even want answered. Just be patient."

"Patient. I'm supposed to be patient. I can't believe that I honestly thought you would give me a straight answer. I can't believe...I..." Dante clutched his head and screamed. The last thing he saw before losing consciousness was the shock and horror on the face of his friend.

* * *

"Plans have been altered. I see that our course has taken us near the planet Ambur. Set the transport for one more test run before we head to the Earth's galaxy,"

said the booming voice of a figure hidden by shadows. “They have weaponry similar to that of Earth, and it will prove interesting to see how it fares against our attack.”

The figure watched silently as the scaly black creature flipped a switch and then made a loud clicking noise. Without hesitation, most of the rest of the spacecraft’s inhabitants lined up and, without any questions, marched through the transport area. The figure turned his attention away from the creature working the transport controls and reached out to turn on the three-dimensional monitor. On the screen, a small militia of armed pink skinned, wolf-like creatures surrounded a few of the creatures he had sent forth. The figure watched as his warriors marched through a barrage of projectile fire and, although many were hit, showed no signs of harm. Seemingly satisfied, the figure turned off the monitor and walked back to his private room.

* * *

Dante awoke with a loud gasp and sat straight up. He looked around at the small, empty room he was lying in and slowly began to remember boarding the plane and having another vision. Getting out of the small, sheetless bed, he saw that there were no visible doors. He walked around the small room, rubbing his hand along each wall trying to discern a way out. Just before he once again reached the bed, he felt an odd tingle and jumped back as his hand went through the wall. Realizing that some sort of advanced holographic technology was being used, he took a deep breath and stepped through.

“Well, Dante, it’s good to see you up and around. I see that it didn’t take long for you to find a way out of your quarters,” John said from a large wall of monitors and controls.

“I get the feeling that I was just in some kind of test, John, and I don’t like that. If you want to test me, then you come to me and tell me that. Don’t set up little surprises for me when I’m waking up from a vision.”

“Well, it wasn’t entirely a test. This level of the base doesn’t use doors, because they can be...too inviting. I will inform you of any future needs to test you, though,” John placed his hand on Dante’s shoulder. “We need to get things started immediately. I need you to tell me everything you can about the visions as we head to the lower lab.”

Dante nodded his head and walked out of the computer room with John. For a while, the two were silent and Dante did nothing but think of his wife at home. He felt some sort of sense of urgency when he thought about her, and he didn’t like that. Arriving at what could only be described as an elevator, Dante and John began their descent into the recesses of the base.

“I told you earlier about some of the visions, and I know you overheard me telling Gwen about the voice I heard in the one right before the hospital.”

“Yes, that’s true. You have had one since then, though. It is imperative that you tell me about it. It might give us some clue as to how much time we have.”

Dante shot John a quizzical stare, but continued speaking anyway, “I heard the voice again. I couldn’t see his face, though. He made sure to stay only in areas where the shadows were prevalent. For a second, I could see with his eyes...I could see what was happening on the planet his creatures were invading. The planet’s inhabitants...they fought back...they shot them...but nothing could stop their advance. What’s worse is...I feel that was their last stop before they come here.”

John closed his eyes and bowed his head, and the two remained silent until the elevator reached the bottom level and the doors opened. John stepped out ahead of Dante and walked up to a small monitor on the other side of the very small room. Dante stepped out into a small room, about 12 ft. by 12 ft. and a ceiling that barely hung a foot above his head.

“What’s going on, John? There’s nothing down here.”

John was looking intently at the monitor and pressing a few buttons on the small control panel just beneath it.

“You’re wrong. This place isn’t nothing, it’s everything,” John pushed another series of buttons and the monitor flashed to life, and a small, hand-shaped screen appeared just below the buttons. “Dante, this is just the doorway. The lock is set to be open only by you. I’ve set it up, now you just need to step over here and place your hand on the screen below the buttons so it can check your fingerprints.”

Dante nodded his head and placed his hand on the designated screen. Upon contact, the monitor flashed again and another mechanism appeared next to it. The monitor was now asking for his visual patterns, so he stepped up to the new mechanism and placed his eye in front of it. After a few seconds, he heard a small clicking noise, followed by a series of low-pitched beeps. The monitor flashed a final time, and Dante could read his name on the screen. John pulled Dante away from the mechanisms and the monitor disappeared into the wall. For a moment, there were no noises or motion from anywhere. Dante looked over at John for answers, but he seemed to be just as intrigued by the events taking place. Finally, after nearly a minute, the entire wall began to shake and a small doorway appeared in the center. Dante and John turned to each other,

shrugged, and proceeded through the doorway. Dante could tell that the new room was much larger, but there was no light except that which came through the doorway.

“John, where are we? Is it supposed to be so dark in here?”

John didn't have time to answer the question before the wall began shaking again and the doorway shut behind them. The room stayed dark for an instant. The lights came on slowly, allowing the two the time necessary to get used to a new source of light. The room itself was slightly larger than an average room, about 40 square feet, and was nearly empty. The only things that Dante could see were a table in the center with some sort of box taking up its full length, and another keypad on the far wall. Dante walked directly to the box on the table and tried to open it, before realizing that it was locked. He turned and gave John a look, which could best be described as a mixture of confusion and hope. John pulled a small, square envelope out of his pocket and handed it to Dante. The envelope was about the size of a business card and appeared to be fairly old. Dante closely examined the envelope. It was labeled, 'Keep him safe' and was signed by Conner Smith, his father. He glanced at John, who turned his head away for a second and then motioned towards the chest on the table. Dante nodded and quickly opened the envelope, which was empty except for two small keys, a silver one and a golden one. He focused on the chest. The only lock he could see was silver, so he took the silver key and turned it slowly in the lock. The lock clicked and the lid to the chest sprang open, revealing a small cassette recorder with a tape in it, three pictures of Conner, and a series of papers with Conner's handwriting on them. Dante picked up the tape recorder and hit play, rightfully expecting to hear his father's voice but still not prepared.

Conner Smith's voice started slow and shakily, but eventually became the strong voice that Dante remembered from his youth, "Dante, if you are hearing this...then the moment that we all hoped...prayed...would never take place is about to happen. Son, I want you to know that I wish that there were some way to keep you from being involved in this, but thanks to what happened on my mission...there's not. I suppose that by now John has told you, or arranged for you to find out, about most of the details of my mission, including what happened to Greta and that creature she gave birth to. What you don't know, however, is what happened during the time after we entered the warp zone and the time we returned.

"Everything was going great with the mission up to that point. All systems were checking out and both Greta and I had no problems in engaging the warping technology. Once we were through the gate, though, everything fell apart. Almost instantly after shooting through the other side of the warp, an alien spacecraft intercepted us and caught our ship in its tractor beam. The aliens were about my size, but much more ferocious-looking. They had black, scaly skin, pupilless eyes, extremely long tongues, and very sharp teeth. Despite our fear from their appearance, they caused us no physical harm. Greta and I, however, were taken to different parts of the ship. We never talked to each other about what was done to us, but it's probable that we both went through the same ordeals. It's still too painful for me to go into exact details about what happened to me on board that ship, but I can say enough so that you understand more about what's going on.

"The first thing they did was inject me with some sort of serum, which caused my muscles to expand to their greatest capacities and probably affected me in other ways, as

well. After this, they performed a variety of experiments on my physical being and my pain thresholds. Then they injected me with another vial of some sort of glowing, greenish liquid. At the time, I had no idea what it was, and admittedly I was in no frame of mind to even consider the ramifications. By now, I'm sure you have found out that your DNA is slightly different from the average human's. I believe that it was this injection that caused that. We soon found, though, that the only consequences of your DNA change were all positive, in that you seemed to be stronger, faster, and smarter than any other child your age. That's why we never told you or your mother, or anyone outside of the scientists working on the case. I'm sure even John thought that I was left in the dark, but I always had my suspicions, which were eventually confirmed for me behind closed doors.

“The next...and last...thing that happened to me, though...it could prove disastrous. Without going into too much detail, what happened was they...used my sperm to impregnate one of their own females, much as they used one of their own males to impregnate Greta. The only thing that I know about the child is that it's a boy...probably with greater variations of the gifts you received. Although everything that had transpired thus far was horrible beyond description, what happened next warrants our worries about an invasion. Just before they sent us back to the vessel, the spacecraft passed an inhabited planet. They transported down and wiped out the planet's residents in hardly any time at all. Apparently each of these creatures has a personal forcefield that prevents any projectile weapon fire from getting past. This makes the aliens virtually unstoppable by most means of warfare. They showed their victims no

mercy and, from the looks of the some of the rooms I saw in the spacecraft, this wasn't their first conquest by a long shot.

"As you can see, we took these events to mean the worst. Once I returned, during the months your mother was pregnant, John, me, and a small group of scientists, went over everything that happened on that mission and tried to prepare for every eventuality. We came to a few simple conclusions. The alien creatures would use what they learned from myself and Greta to eventually attempt an invasion of Earth. Knowing what little we did about them and their forcefields, we came to the conclusion that only more primitive weapons could be used against them. You will find the prototype of a specially designed weapon elsewhere in this room. We don't know for sure if it will work, since we were never able to obtain any hard data about the forcefields, but it is the best we can do.

"That brings me to the hardest thing I've ever had to say to you. Right now, as I'm making this tape, you are 16 years old and exhibiting many special talents, foremost being your lung capacity. Have you ever noticed how you never seem to lose your breath, or how you never have any problems staying underwater longer than everyone else does? When you were much younger, I ran a series of do-it-at-home tests on you, without anyone else's knowledge or consent. I found that your skin is tougher than that of a normal human, and you really don't need to breathe. I believe that the only reason you do so is because of instinct. Combined with your superior strength and mental prowess, you are our best...maybe our only...hope for survival if the aliens ever come. You are connected to them, through your DNA, and you will probably feel...somehow...when and if they make a move towards Earth.

“Regrettably, I can see that the time allotted for this private recording is growing short. I wish that there were some other way that this could be handled, but if we wait for an invasion there would be too much panic and unnecessary death. You must be the first line of defense...of offense...of hope. All the specific details of the plan are outlined in the papers in this very box. I wish that I could be there to help you deal with all of this, but another of the conditions of you hearing this tape was my death. I’m sorry, son...I’m sorry that it has to be you. I want you to know that I love you, and that I’m always with you...no matter what. Please...be careful...”

The tape recorder finally ran out of tape and shut off. Dante had tears in his eyes and even more questions on his mind, but now he finally knew that everything was up to him. He knew that he would do his best to succeed, not only for the sake of the planet, but for his father as well. He picked up the papers and handed them to John, and then walked over to the small keypad on the wall and began the identification process once again.

John looked over the papers. A few of them contained explicit directions for designing a device. Realizing what Conner’s plan was, he quickly looked up at Dante, who was in the process of placing his eye over a visual scanner.

“Dante, you have to look at this. What they had planned...I’m afraid that it might be too dangerous. There has to be another way.”

“I’ll look in a second. I want to see what happens now that I’ve been recognized by this thing.” Dante stepped back and looked at John as a small section of the wall pulled back and disappeared. “Besides, I think it’s too late for me to worry about my own safety. The choice is out of my hands.”

John nodded silently and both men returned their attention to the area in the wall, which was making a strange clicking noise. After a few seconds, two metallic arm-like shafts extended out holding a sheathed sword. Dante removed the sword from the grasp of the metallic shafts and examined it. As soon as the sword was removed, the clicking sound started up again and the shafts returned into the wall. The sword itself was extremely well crafted and looked brand new. Its handle had Dante's name sculpted into the metallic handle, which looked to be nearly a foot long. Dante ran his hand over the nearly four foot long sharpened blade, trying to discern what type of metal was used to make it. It seemed to be sturdier than any stainless steel sword that Dante had seen before. He looked over to get John's reaction, but he was still studying the papers.

"This is the 'secret weapon?' How am I supposed to defeat an alien race using a sword, even if it is specially made?" Dante pulled the sword behind his back and then brought it forward again with a powerful practice swing.

"That is what I am talking about, son. This plan is extremely dangerous. According to these papers, you are supposed to teleport onto their spaceship with that sword and see to it that the invasion is stopped...by any means necessary," John finally looked up from the papers. "That sword is made of a space-age metal, not used anywhere but this base. It's supposedly indestructible. According to your father's recording and these notes, the only way to stop the alien creatures while they're wearing those forcefields is through physical force, which includes a hand-held sword."

"Indestructible? Interesting," Dante re-examined the sword and then, reacting to something John said, looked up at John quizzically. "Did you say that I'm supposed to

teleport onto a spaceship...alone? How am I supposed to do that...we don't know the coordinates to the ship...do we?"

"No. That's just it. We don't know the coordinates of the ship...as far as where it is now," John paused and handed Dante the papers. "Based on our knowledge of the warping technology, and our hypothesis that the aliens now have that technology, we can determine exactly where their ship will be seconds after entering our galaxy."

"So...I'm supposed to be teleported to an area of space...where you 'hypothesize' the spaceship will be shortly after entering our galaxy?" Dante ran his hand through his hair. "That...that is a suicide mission...maybe not even that. There's no guarantee that I won't just wind up in the middle of space."

"Yes, I know. I'm going to go on record right now as being against this. There has to be another way. Even if we manage to get you aboard that ship, there is no way to guarantee that you won't materialize in a room filled with the aliens. This is too dangerous, Dante. There are too many unknown factors involved."

Dante took the papers and studied them, ignoring John's last few comments. He skimmed past the parts that John had already explained and tried to make sense of the last few pages. There was really no new information, other than detailed instructions on building the teleportation device and the actual coordinates. Dante sighed and laid the papers down on the table. He closed his eyes and pictured Gwen, sitting at home waiting for him to return. Then he remembered everything that he had seen in his visions involving the aliens and their systematic invasions of the two planets, and who knows how many more. Even though his father's plan seemed to be a probable suicide mission, Dante refused to let the aliens invade Earth...and harm Gwen.

“It doesn’t matter, John. I want this started right away. I don’t care about the consequences.”

“Dante, please think about this. Even if you do manage to get aboard that ship undetected, you will be up against an army of aliens and possibly your father’s other progeny.”

Dante went silent for a moment at the mention of his “brother,” but then started his trek out of the room and back up to an upper level.

“Like I said, I know the risks. But can you honestly tell me that we’ll think of a better way...a safer way?” Dante looked straight into John’s eyes and went silent. He thought to himself the words that he couldn’t bring himself to say. He realized it was the only plan available and there was too much riding on it for him to dwell on his fears.

“I can’t sit idly by while alien butchers invade Earth, not now that I know about it. I have to find a way to stop them...for Gwen...for my father,” Dante thought to himself.

Dante walked into the elevator and waited patiently for John, who was slowly retrieving the papers and the tape recorder. John entered the elevator with a grim expression on his face, which matched Dante’s own, as the two silently withstood the short ascent to the upper labs. Immediately after stepping through the elevator doors, John pulled out his radio and made a few short calls to certain members of the base to come to duty. After making sure that the head scientists understood their instructions, John silently walked over to Dante and placed his hand firmly on his shoulder.

“The preparations are being made, son. There’s nothing more for you to do until the teleportation device is built. One of our satellites has been set to focus on the area that the ship should come out of the warp and into our galaxy. Since there is no way to

accurately surmise when that will be, you need to stay in this area and remain ready,” John removed his hand and stepped slightly closer to Dante. “Is there anything that you need? I’m afraid that there won’t be any way for you to make it home before you have to teleport. I’m sorry.”

Dante turned away from John, “Get Gwen. I don’t care what it takes, but I want her to be here.”

“Dante, this is a top secret base...”

Dante turned and held up his hand, “I don’t care what you have to do to get her here--whether its blindfold or a mild tranquilizer--just do it. I’m not going anywhere until I know that she is at least on the way here.”

John sighed as he picked up his phone, “I hope this doesn’t blow up in our faces.”

* * *

“What’s going on, John? Where’s Dante?” Gwen said into the phone as she walked to the front door and opened it. She was slightly startled to see a sleek black limousine sitting in front of her house and a man in a black suit and dark sunglasses walking towards her house. “John, what’s happening?”

Gwen’s question was cut off as the man grabbed her. She scarcely felt the needle being injected into her arm. The man caught her as she fell and gently carried her to the car and placed her in the back seat, before speeding off towards the airport.

* * *

Dante’s eyes focused on the scientists as they built the teleportation device. His thoughts, though, were jumping around a multitude of topics. He knew that John would manage to get Gwen there somehow. Despite all that had happened recently between the

two of them, John had still never let Dante down when he needed him. The thing that really had Dante worried, however, was that he hadn't had a vision since before he arrived at the base. While it didn't upset him that the visions had stopped, wondered why they had stopped. Two possible scenarios crossed his mind. The visions might not have been real at all but just his imagination. The other case was that the aliens had devised a different way to arrive in Earth's galaxy and were in the process of planning a surprise attack. Dante didn't really give much credence to the second scenario, because, with the size and ferocity of the alien invasion force, not to mention their personal forcefields, they didn't need a surprise attack to take over the Earth. The first scenario really frightened him. He already knew that his DNA was altered in some ways because of experiments on his father by aliens, but there was no way, other than his father's observations and his own visions, to know if the aliens were actually planning a hostile invasion. If the visions were just coming from his imagination, then that brought about the possibility that he might be going through some changes. He rubbed his hand across his face as the possibility of losing his sanity flashed through his mind. He didn't have a chance to complete the thought, because John walked into the room and loudly cleared his throat to announce his arrival.

"When will she be here, John?" Dante stood up and looked John in the eye.

"These guys are almost done with the teleportation device, so it had better be soon."

"I have arranged for her to be brought here very soon. I can't promise that it will be before you have to leave, but I have done my part." John stepped back and started to walk away. "Remember...it was your idea to bring her here."

Dante nodded his agreement as John joined the scientists who were working on the teleportation device. He knew that it wasn't the smartest move to have Gwen brought to a secret base and let her know that Dante was going to be leaving the planet. In his mind, he knew how selfish he was being, but in his heart, he had to see Gwen at least one more time.

* * *

"Yes, sir. The teleportation device will be finished within the hour. The satellite is in position, and all systems have been set to send a signal the very moment that something enters through the warp area." The small, pale man wearing glasses and a white coat scribbled on a notepad as he spoke to John.

"Good. I will be going with Dante to an upper level upon the arrival of his wife." John paused. "She shouldn't be witness to anything more than the very minimal."

The scientist cocked his head and looked at John, seemingly waiting for John to continue. However, John gave him a pat on the back and turned to walk towards a small room filled with monitors and communications equipment. He sat down and focused all his attention on one single monitor. The monitor was focused on Gwen, who was still unconscious and lying in a seat aboard a speeding airplane. Feeling content that Gwen was being safely transported, John picked up a small radio just beneath the monitor.

"This is John Dawson. What is your current position?"

"With our current speed, we will land at the base in around half an hour," came the pilot's voice from the radio.

"Good. Notify me the second you arrive." John put down the radio and went back to watching the monitors.

This time, he focused on the monitor receiving its transmission from the room Dante was in. John curiously watched Dante as he took the sword back out of its sheath and stood up. Dante closed his eyes and stood in a nearly perfect fighting position, holding the sword straight out in front of him. After practicing more than a dozen different moves, both offensive and defensive, Dante looked around. John's curiosity piqued as Dante walked to the corner and looked straight into the hidden camera. Since John hadn't mentioned the camera or the monitoring room to Dante, there was no way that he could have known he was being watched, much less where the camera was. John's eyes grew large as Dante smiled into the camera and threw the sword in that exact direction. Forgetting himself, John jumped as the sword seemingly flew through the screen and the picture was lost. He quickly looked around on all sides to see if anyone else had noticed, but he was still the only one in the room. Immediately, he left the room and headed for Dante's position. He found Dante to be sitting down, holding the sword in his hands and staring at it.

"Sorry about the camera, John. I told you, though...if you want to test me, come to me directly. That includes filming, too," Dante turned to John and smiled.

"How...how did you know there was a camera in the room? How did you detect its exact position?"

Dante ran his hand through his hair, "I'm not exactly sure. I was practicing some of the sword fighting techniques that I have learned, and I suddenly got a feeling that someone was watching me. I can't really explain the sensation, but I just knew what and where it was."

“Hmm. It seems as if you are continuing to manifest some new abilities. This may be worth examining if we have enough time,” John paused and looked around. “Tell me, can you sense anything else?”

Dante shut his eyes and became completely silent, even going without breathing for a moment. He focused his mind on Gwen, and soon gained a picture of her unconscious body lying aboard a plane finishing its descent. He opened his eyes and looked over to John, smiling.

“It seems almost like I can control the visions now. It’s like they were an early sign that I would gain some sort of psychic powers,” Dante paused, relieved at the new evidence against his losing his sanity. “Gwen is arriving. I saw her unconscious on a plane, as it was landing here.”

John started to speak, but was cut off by a voice coming from his personal radio.

“We’ve landed, sir. Please instruct further.”

John looked up at Dante in awe and quietly nodded his head, “Bring her to level J-23 and give her the injection to bring her out of her trance.” John put the radio away and turned to Dante. “This is possibly the break that we have needed, son. You must continue to practice using this new gift until the time comes for your teleportation. Before we go to J-23, I want you to see if you can connect with anyone or anything from the spaceship.”

Dante nodded and once again closed his eyes and focused his mind. Since he had some knowledge of one of the ship’s inhabitants, he tried to focus on the few images of his brother that he had glimpsed thus far. For an instant, he made a connection. He felt all of the hatred and pain coming from his brother’s mind, and he saw everything that his

brother saw. He watched through his brother's eyes as he soared through space in a vector unknown by humans. Tensing up, his brother turned and walked towards an object resembling a mirror. He strained to get a glimpse of a face or of any distinguishing characteristics, but his brother had apparently shut his eyes. There was only blackness and silence, until he heard the same voice that had threatened him earlier, as well as gave out the orders of invasion to his apparent alien subjects.

“Soon.”

It started as a whisper and grew louder, shaking Dante back to his own body once again. Dante opened his eyes and could feel the fear flowing through every part of his body. He almost fell over as he tried to stand up. He hobbled over to John, who struggled to help Dante regain his balance.

“What happened? Did it work?” John's voice was frantic, half through the thrill of general scientific curiosity and half through concern for his friend.

“I was...I was him. I saw through his eyes...I could tell what he was thinking...what he was feeling. So much hatred...so much pain...”

“Dante, you've got to calm down. You've got to remember exactly what happened. Did you find out anything?”

Dante rubbed his hands over his eyes and moved away from John to regain his composure, “Okay...I think...I think I can handle it all now. It was just so intense, being in someone else's thoughts. I couldn't find out anything exact about when they will arrive, but just before I was forced out of his mind, he said...he just said 'soon.' He knew I was there. He's a step ahead of us, John. Take me to Gwen. I have to see her now, before it's too late.”

John nodded and led Dante out of the room to the elevator, to ascend to level J-23. Once they arrived on the appropriate level, Dante began to lead the way, trying to use his mind to detect the room that held his wife. John walked quietly behind and, once they entered Gwen's room, he stood in a corner and observed. Gwen was just beginning to come out of her trance and was extremely confused.

"Where am I? Dante...John...who was that man at my house. That's the last thing I remember. What's going on?"

Dante glanced to John. "Well, honey, I wanted you brought here to be with me, and the only way to get you here without compromising the security of the base was to have you unconscious. I'm sorry, but I really need you here right now."

Gwen put her arms around Dante's neck and looked into his eyes, "You don't have to be sorry. Just tell me what's going on. Why did you need me here so quickly?"

Dante cleared his throat, "Gwen, I don't know how to say this without freaking you out, so I'm just going to come straight out. I have to go aboard the alien spaceship. I'm the only one who has a chance at stopping this without causing a panic."

Gwen removed her hands from Dante and dropped to the bed, "You're not coming back...are you? Dante, I need you. Don't leave me."

"I don't have a choice anymore, princess. I have to go," Dante leaned in and kissed his wife. "I will come back to you. I promise."

Before Gwen got a chance to reply, a large man in a lab coat holding a clipboard entered the room.

“Excuse me, sir. The teleportation device has been finished, and we have some interesting data coming from the satellite. We think the warp gate is being prepared to open.”

John nodded and turned to Dante, who had shut his eyes and was holding Gwen close. Dante helped Gwen to her feet and they followed John to the elevator. Just before entering the elevator, a man in a dark suit and dark glasses walked up and grabbed Gwen. Dante shoved him away and gave John a threatening glance. John nodded his approval to the man and then stepped into the elevator, along with Dante and Gwen.

* * *

Dante’s brother quietly shut the door to his room and walked slowly and confidently towards the alien creature manning the main controls.

“I trust we are on schedule with the opening of the warp gate,” he said with a threatening stare at the trembling creature, who responded with a series of clicks and strange noises seemingly coming from the back of his throat.

“Excellent. We will give them what they expect, just not exactly how they expect it.”

His laughter was soon cut off by a second alien creature that emerged from a path leading to the main section of the ship. The creatures made similar noises, which were also met by laughter from Dante’s brother.

“No, that will not be necessary. I want him to teleport aboard the ship unharmed. Yes, I look forward to seeing the look on his face when he realizes that he is too late to stop the invasion. Prepare the forces now,” he turned once again to the alien creature

manning the main controls. "Make the final necessary calculations and prepare the ship for warp."

* * *

Dante stood with his arm around Gwen and watched as John and a small group of scientists inspected the teleportation device. He didn't need to use his newfound psychic ability to know that things were nearing their climax. Thinking about what had to be done, he gently squeezed Gwen with a little more force. Dante looked down and kissed his wife, but before he could say what was on his mind, a scientist came in from the adjoining room carrying a printed document.

"Sir, you need to take a look at this," he handed the document to John. "I think it's time to make the final preparations."

John anxiously looked over the document and then slowly raised his head to meet Dante's gaze.

"Dante...this information is from our satellite nearest the suspected warp point," John closed his eyes and slowly cleared his throat. "I'm afraid Gwen is going to have to leave the immediate area while we make the final preparations for your jump. I'm sorry."

"Dante...please...is there any other way?" Gwen clutched Dante tightly and started to cry. "I can't do this without you."

"I'm sorry, princess. There's no one else who has any chance of succeeding," Dante paused and cocked his head, giving Gwen a confused glance. "You can't do what without me?"

Gwen pulled away slightly and wiped the tears from her eyes, “I just meant...I need you. I love you...”

Dante realized immediately that she wasn’t telling him everything, but before he could question her, John once again interrupted.

“I realize that this is difficult for both of you, but we have run out of time. This has to go down very soon. Gwen, you must leave the area now.”

Dante cut off the man in the dark suit and glasses as he walked towards Gwen; “You’d better do as John says. I have no idea what’s involved in the teleportation, and I don’t think you need to see any more than necessary.” Dante pulled Gwen in close and kissed her softly. “I love you, and I won’t leave you alone. I promise.”

“I love you, too. Please be careful. Please come back as soon as you can...” Gwen kissed him on the cheek and then turned and accompanied the man out of the room and off the level.

“Dante, please put on this jumpsuit. It’s one of NASA’s, and, seeing as how we don’t know exactly what the atmosphere of the ship will be like, it can’t hurt for you to have it.”

Dante held the orange jumpsuit in his hands and noticed the different emblems on it, both for NASA and for the United States. He half-smiled and quickly stepped into it and fastened it up, as a group of scientists punched a few buttons and fired up the teleportation device. Dante fidgeted a little to straighten out his jersey inside the jumpsuit.

“We’ve begun the countdown. There is someone in the control room waiting for word from the satellite of the exact instant the ship enters our area of space.” John

motioned for Dante to step directly in front of a large oval-shaped device attached to the machine. “Immediately after we receive that confirmation, you must step through this portal.”

“Shouldn’t I have a helmet or oxygen or an actual spacesuit, instead of just this jumpsuit thing?”

As John cleared his throat, his concerned glance matched that of one of the scientists who had overheard as he was handing Dante the sword. “No...you don’t need anything else. I’m afraid that if this doesn’t work...if you don’t teleport exactly aboard the ship...”

Dante cut him off, “Then I’ll be dead. I understand.” Dante looked down and softly sighed.

“I’m sorry, son. I hope...I know you’ll come back to us in one piece.” John was interrupted by a loud noise and a scientist running out of the control room.

John stepped back and turned away as the portal opened. Dante clutched his sword tightly and looked towards John. The two shared a moment of silent understanding and hope as Dante half-smiled and stepped through the portal.

“All we can do now is wait. I’m sure he’ll contact us somehow if he makes it.”

John lowered his head and slowly walked towards the elevator to join Gwen on one of the upper levels.

* * *

“He’s coming. Send the invasion force through the portal now. I only want a small force to stay behind. I don’t want him to accomplish his goal of finding me too

easily. After all, he has to prove himself worthy of my time.” Dante’s brother laughed as he turned around and once again walked back into his private room.

The alien creature at the main controls clicked a few noises and pressed some buttons as a great multitude of others similar to it entered the room. After a few more clicking noises between the apparent commander of the forces and the creature at the controls, the portal opened and the invasion force began to silently step through.

* * *

Seconds after stepping through the teleportation portal, Dante emerged in what appeared to be a docking bay of an incredibly huge spaceship. He closed his eyes and, whispering a small prayer, removed the sword from its sheath. Carefully, he looked around to make sure he was alone in this area of the ship. Once he felt as secure as he could on an alien spaceship, he closed his eyes and tried to mentally contact John. He didn’t have time to say anything to John, other than letting him know he had arrived and wasn’t floating helplessly in outer space. Once the contact was made, Dante felt an overwhelming sense of fear and confusion coming from John. Unfortunately he didn’t have time to delve any further to see what was happening, because three of the alien creatures he had seen in his visions entered the room and began to look around. Dante stepped back, allowing the shadows to engulf him, and watched as the alien creatures split up and searched the area.

Dante remained almost completely immobile until one of the aliens came within a few feet of his position. The alien moved his head around in a fashion that made Dante assume he was about to be discovered. He waited until the alien turned around and then reached out and pulled it back into the shadows with him. Silently, he twirled the

creature around so he could look into its eyes, and then quickly rammed his sword through its throat. The alien clutched the wound and fell to the ground in a heap. Dante reached down and removed some sort of metallic wristband from the alien, hoping that he was correct in guessing what it was. Pushing the button, he felt a small shock and dropped it to the ground. His jaw dropped momentarily as a small circular forcefield prevented the wristband from touching the ground. He reached down and, applying a small amount of force, managed to reach through the forcefield and once again push the button.

“Well, when in Rome...” Dante’s voice trailed off as he picked up the wristband, placed it on his wrist and once more pushed the button to activate the forcefield, which clung to his body like a second layer of skin.

Dante leapt up to grab onto a higher platform and pulled himself up. He squatted low, planning a course of action, as the two aliens clicked to each other and examined their fallen comrade. Dante jumped, knocking both to the ground. Clutching his sword, he sliced open the throat of one of the aliens, before the second one knocked him away. Dante pulled himself up and turned to face his enemy, who was now giving off a low, growling noise instead of the usual clicking. The alien moved forward a step before he quickly sprang at his prey. Ducking down, Dante, with one fluent motion sliced off the alien’s head. As its body hit the ground, Dante was through the main door.

He was now in a much larger room with twice as much equipment. The single alien sat quietly at a control panel in front of a large three-dimensional screen and next to a machine that looked startlingly familiar to the teleportation device on Earth. As Dante quietly crept forward, he was interrupted by a loud noise. He turned slowly and was

taken aback at what he saw. Half-expecting to see another alien, he was woefully unprepared to gaze upon the face of his “brother.” The man he was now locking eyes with was taller than Dante with a more muscular build. He was clad nearly all in black, from his boots to his trench coat, except for a pair of red gloves. Dante lowered his sword and made a move towards him.

“Who are you?” Dante asked, vainly attempting to mask the fear he was feeling.

The man’s scruffy face pulled back into a smile as he removed his trench coat, revealing his bare, muscular arms.

“I believe you already know who I am, Dante.”

“You...you can’t be...you’re my brother?”

An eerie silence filled the room as the man walked to the alien at the control panel, whispered something, and then turned once again to face Dante.

“I suppose that’s true enough. You already know the story, I’m sure. I can see by the weapon in your hand that you have finally received word of the plan by the man who would be my father.” He looked at Dante’s sword and laughed. “Enough of the formalities, though, ‘brother.’ My name, in your language, is Ulysses. Quite ironic, isn’t it. Both of us named after great heroes, and both of us being touted as a ‘savior’ to our races.”

“Saviors to our races? You’re not a savior to your race. You’re trying to butcher it.” Dante was beginning once again to feel the adrenaline pumping through him and gaining back some of his courage. “You are nothing but a murderer in the name of an alien race of which you’re not even a true part.”

“Don’t fool yourself, brother. I am just as much a part of this race as you are of the human race. We are above all races and owe nothing to any. I am no more a murderer for destroying lesser beings than you are for stepping on a common insect.”

“That’s crazy. You’re wiping out entire races of beings that are just like you, just like me. They’re capable of feeling and reasoning. Can’t you see that?” Dante pointed his sword at the alien sitting at the control panel, who had begun to rise. “I understand what you must have gone through, not having a family, but you can’t keep doing this. I won’t let you keep doing this.”

“I’m afraid there’s really very little you can do to stop me. We share much of our DNA, so I know you can’t be this stupid.” Ulysses laughed as he pointed to a button on the control panel, which the alien pressed. “Haven’t you found it strange that you’ve only encountered four aliens aboard a ship this large?”

Dante turned to look at the screen. He stood frozen, horrified, not able to speak or even move. The aliens had teleported to Earth and were attacking Area 51.

* * *

“Get her to a lower level now,” John screamed, trying to make his voice heard amidst all the panic and confusion. “They haven’t made it into the base yet, but we can’t take any chances. Remember, guns won’t work. Use your knives, spears, anything you can find to stab these things.”

Gwen stood alone in the corner, clutching her stomach. With tears streaming down her face, she could only think of Dante and their yet-to-be-born child. She suddenly felt a pang of regret that she hadn’t revealed her condition to Dante before he left.

“Gwen, honey, you have to go with these men to the lowest level. We can’t take any chances with your safety. I owe Dante that much.” John took Gwen’s hand and led her to the elevator where two large men in dark suits were waiting.

“What about you, John? Aren’t you coming with us?” Gwen paused, realizing what John might be planning. “You...you can’t fight, John! You haven’t been in a combat situation for years. Please, please don’t leave me.”

John looked at one of the men in dark suits and slowly nodded his head. He stepped back as the men gently pulled Gwen into the elevator.

“I’m sorry, Gwen. I may not understand much about these alien creatures, but I am the only one here that understands anything at all. Don’t worry. This will all be over soon. Dante will take care of everything on his end, and we’ll take care of everything on this end.”

“John! Don’t leave me. I can’t lose you both, not now.” Gwen unsuccessfully tried to pull away from her escorts as the elevator doors began to shut. “I’m pregnant. I can’t do this alone. Please.”

Upon hearing Gwen’s announcement, John closed his eyes and lowered his head, turning away from the elevator. He heard the doors shut behind him, and he heard Gwen’s screams of protest coming from within as the elevator began its descent, but all he could think of was Dante. Dante was off in space fighting alone and didn’t even know he was going to be a father. John shook his head and slowly walked to another elevator, this one heading up, grabbing a bayonet rifle along the way.

* * *

Dante wiped his hand across his face as the image on the screen faded. He felt a terrible sense of dread deep inside as Ulysses, now laughing, turned to him again.

“It appears that you won’t be the only one to die for a futile cause today, brother.” Ulysses placed one arm on the alien and another behind his back.

A sound similar to a growl emerged from Dante’s throat as he raised his sword in the air and ran towards Ulysses. With one seemingly instant series of motions, Dante’s sword sliced down towards Ulysses throat, but was stopped short as another sword emerged from behind Ulysses back and blocked it.

“Really, Dante, I’m disappointed in you. Did you actually think that I didn’t know what father’s plan was? Did you actually think that I wouldn’t have access to the only way to pierce the alien forcefields?” Ulysses shoved Dante back and stepped away from the alien and the control panel. “Since we do still share much of the same DNA, I’ll give you a chance to renounce the human race and rule with me. Think about it, Dante. The invasion has already begun. You would only have to stand by my side and wait as the inevitable occurs. Surely you don’t still think you have a chance of victory. They sent you here on a suicide mission. One man against an entire race of aliens. To them, you’re just cannon fodder. Stand by my side and be a king, or stand by theirs and die humiliated. It’s your choice.”

“If we are related in some way--anyway--then you know what my answer is, butcher. You will not win this day. You will not take over Earth. If I fall, then someone will rise and take my place. We have fought through tough times before. We have been told that the cause is hopeless before. Well, Ulysses, the cause is never hopeless. I may indeed die today, but I swear that you won’t live to gloat.”

Dante ripped off the tattered remains of the NASA jumpsuit and threw off the Reds jersey. He stepped closer to Ulysses, holding his sword out in front with both hands. Ulysses smiled and took the first swing. Dante easily blocked the opening move and returned with a blow of his own. The swords were nearly exact, and each time they connected sparks flew and a nearly deafening clang emerged. Neither man noticed, though, as any loss of concentration would ultimately prove fatal. The alien turned his attention from the control panel and watched in awe as Dante and Ulysses matched each other moves, swing for swing, with neither man gaining a discernible advantage.

Realizing that this could go on for much more time than he could afford, Dante tried to out-think his opponent, rather than out-fight him. He waited for the right moment, when Ulysses was on the offensive, and allowed Ulysses' powerful swing to knock him to the ground. In the same motion, he dropped to his back and kicked Ulysses' feet out from under him. Ulysses fell with a heavy thud, but Dante knew not to take it for granted. He leapt up from the ground, as Ulysses did the same, and with a spinning move in the air, came down with as much force as he could bring forth, knocking Ulysses sword from his grasp. Ulysses' expression of confidence quickly faded into a look closely resembling fear. Keeping on the offensive, Dante used his free hand to punch Ulysses in the jaw, knocking him once more to the ground. He kicked the sword out of his visible range and steadily held his own sword across Ulysses' throat.

"No...No. You can't kill me. You won't." Ulysses spoke with a shaky voice, void of the element of confidence. "We are brothers, Dante. I'm your last connection to your father."

Dante removed his foot from Ulysses' chest and allowed him to stand, however still keeping his sword across his throat.

"I don't intend to kill you. First, you're going to call off the invasion and bring all the aliens back aboard the ship, and then you're going to teleport back to Earth with me and face up to everything you've done." Dante removed his sword from Ulysses' throat, and instead held it with the point into Ulysses' back as he led him to the control panel.

"Very well. You won fairly, and I am subject to whatever terms of surrender you devise." Ulysses walked slowly with his head down, and his eyes focusing just behind the control panel. "I understand how upset you must be. You obviously are afraid that something will happen to your dear friend or your loving wife."

"Just bring the aliens back and stop talking." Dante paused for a second. "You keep pointing out how we share DNA, how we're family. If you do understand anything about family, then you know that I will kill you if I have to, and figure out how to work everything on my own."

"Yes, I do understand family. I understand that I was left behind by a father I never knew. If he truly cared, he could have found a way to take me with him. This race of aliens wouldn't have lifted a finger to stop him. They were peaceful."

"What are you talking about? These aliens abducted his ship to run some tests. My father...our father...didn't have any choice but to leave."

Ulysses turned slowly to face Dante, distracting him as he reached his hand behind the control panel. "I see you don't know the true story. That makes sense,

though. I suppose you wouldn't risk your life for a group of...how did you term it earlier? Ah, yes, a group of butchers."

"You're not making any sense. I know what happened to my father and his partner. I've heard the tape he left behind for me, and I've read all the files and notes. He realized how violent this race was, so he made a contingency plan in case they ever sent an invasion force." Dante's voice was less confident than before as he dropped the sword slowly to his side.

"Conner Smith's mission did not fail, as was reported to you. In fact, everything went according to plan. Conner and his companion were on a search for intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, and found it on the planet they named Rastaan. The aliens they encountered were completely peaceful, that is, until the humans arrived and gave them a reason to be otherwise." Ulysses' hand latched on to something behind the monitor and he smiled. "Conner injected himself with the serum that gave you your special DNA, shortly after tests ran on the alien child he sired scientifically showed that it was superior to humans. After taking everything they needed, Conner and the woman left the planet and returned to Earth. He left me behind, probably hoping that I would die on my own. He was wrong, though. I thrived on that planet. As a much stronger and more intelligent being, I easily took control as I grew to adulthood. After learning of everything that happened in the days surrounding my birth...well you can guess the rest. In fact, you're living it."

"That's...that's absurd. Why would he lie about something like that? Why would we send astronauts to another planet to experiment on innocent beings?" Dante's head was reeling. He was beginning to think that Ulysses' story had a ring of truth to it.

“Use your intelligence, Dante. Look at yourself. You’re stronger, faster, more intelligent...better in every way than a normal human. It’s a pity you didn’t figure things out on your own before. It would have saved you the trouble of coming all the way to the spaceship just to die.”

Ulysses pulled his hand from behind the control panel and pointed a laser weapon at Dante. He didn’t give Dante a chance of reacting as he pulled the trigger and laughed as the resulting blast sent Dante across the room and slammed him into a wall. Ulysses confidently strode across the room and stood over Dante’s body, smiling.

“I gave you the choice, Dante. It didn’t have to end this way. I honestly would have allowed you to rule with me...well, perhaps beneath me.”

Ulysses laughter was cut short as Dante opened his eyes and rammed his sword through Ulysses’ abdomen. Dante held firm to the sword as he stood up, and then, after slowly removing the sword and allowing Ulysses to fall to his knees, brought it back for another swing.

“You know, Ulysses, you were right about one thing. The end is inevitable.” Dante brought the sword down across Ulysses’ throat, completely decapitating him. He removed the alien wristband he had taken earlier. Apparently there was a limit to what its power could do. Dante was thankful that it had not shorted out until after he had needed it.

Dante paused for a moment standing over his brother’s body. He shook his head slowly, feeling a sense of sadness over what could have been and what never was. Dante looked up to see the alien attempting to leave the room.

“Where do you think you’re going? I have no clue how to speak your language, but I have a pretty good feeling that you can understand mine.” Dante walked towards the alien with his sword extended. “I want you to teleport all the aliens back right now. This has to end.”

The alien emitted a few clicking noises, seemingly upset, and sat back down at the controls. He pressed a few buttons and the teleportation device began to glow. Dante stood back amazed as a multitude of aliens emerged through the glowing center of the teleportation device and began to fill the room. For some reason, probably fear, each one stood perfectly still after entering through the portal. Still waiting for the process to finish, Dante concentrated on contacting John on Earth to see how things had gone. As, his mind locked onto John’s, he saw through John’s eyes all the death and destruction the aliens had caused. He also felt a strong sense of pain coming from John and, looking down, realized that John had been severely wounded.

“John, can you hear me? Are you okay? What happened down there?”

John heard Dante’s voice inside his head and paused a moment in a state of shock before responding.

“I’m...I’ll be fine with some medical attention, son. We managed to keep them from entering the lower levels of the base, but it took a great deal of sacrifice. Gwen’s safe, though. You’re still gonna be a father.” John paused for a moment, remembering that Dante hadn’t known. “What happened on your end, Dante? The aliens are all retreating through some hole that appeared out of nowhere, and I’m assuming that’s your handiwork.”

Dante let the fatherhood comment go by, knowing he had more pressing matters to deal with first. He would soon be contacting Gwen.

“Things are being taken care of up here. It took a lot out of me, but I’m still alive, and my ‘brother,’ Ulysses is dead.” Dante scanned the ship before continuing. “But there’s something I want to...I need to know. Before I killed him, Ulysses told me that everything I’ve been told is a lie. He said that my father was part of a secret mission to attack the planet, and the aliens are only attacking Earth as revenge. Who’s telling the truth? Before you answer, remember that I cannot only speak through your mind, but I can also read your thoughts if I have to.”

John went silent for a moment and slowly limped into a small, unmanned room.

“Dante, it’s not important. It’s over. Just come back to your wife. We’ll discuss everything when you get here.”

“That’s what I was afraid of. Why couldn’t you have been honest with me, John? I really am just cannon fodder to you, aren’t I?” Dante stopped and a wave of sadness passed over him. “Don’t you understand? They’re not going to quit now. Ulysses may have been responsible for most of this, but they don’t need him now. As long as they’re alive they’ll continue to attack, and eventually they might win. There’s only one way to stop them, John. I’ve got to blow up the ship. I want you to remember always that I have to commit genocide because of your lies.”

“Dante, you have to understand, it was for the betterment of mankind. I know that doesn’t sound like a viable reason to you right now, but you will understand.”

“I don’t want to understand, John. After I make sure the ship will be blown up, I just want to teleport home and never speak of this again. I know things will never be the same again, especially for us. When this is over, so is our ‘friendship.’”

John’s mind stopped. The teleportation machine used to send Dante to the spacecraft had been destroyed. Looking closer, he found a single alien creature clawing at the wreckage and growling. The alien must gotten away from its invasion force and found a way to slip inside unnoticed and then, recognizing the teleportation machine, had tried to activate it on its own.

“Dante...the teleportation machine...is it still intact aboard the ship?”

“Yes, for now. It appears that all the aliens are back on board, and that teleportation device appears to be the only thing I can sabotage that will cause a big enough explosion to take out the whole ship. It’s amazing how streamlined everything is.” Dante stopped. “Why? Is something wrong with the teleportation machine down there? You can still use it to get me home, right?”

There was a long, awkward silence before John finally responded with another thought. “Son...an alien...it got by us. The machine is destroyed. That device on the ship is the only way for you to get home. There has to be another way to blow up the ship.”

A sense of fear and regret overcame Dante. While he knew what had to be done, he prayed for an alternative. Before he had the chance to respond to John and perhaps even quickly think of a better way, an alien struck him from behind. The news of the teleportation device being destroyed had distracted him, leaving him vulnerable. He knew that there were no alternatives. He allowed the force of the alien’s blow to knock

him to the ground, but rolled himself over and drove his sword into the alien's chest. The advancing aliens quickly stopped and froze in place. Dante used the momentary lapse in action to send a short message to Gwen.

“Gwen, I want you to always remember that I love you. I went on this mission for you, and I'm going to finish the mission for you. John let it slip about our baby, our first child. It's tearing me up inside that I won't be able to be there as he grows up. I'm not going to give you a chance to respond to this, because I think it would be too easy to talk me out of it. The only way to insure Earth's safety is to blow up the ship, and the only way to make sure that happens is to stay here until the explosions start. Since the teleportation device on Earth is destroyed this means that I can't...I won't be coming home. I have to go now. Please forgive me for leaving you alone. Make sure our child knows who I am, and that I love him, too. I love you, princess. Goodbye.”

Dante could feel Gwen's emotions as he finished his message. Her tears became his as he left her mind. He hoped that she would be able to make it through the tough times to come, with the child, but he couldn't afford to dwell on her. He had to finish his mission before the alien controlling the teleportation machine regained his nerve and sent the aliens back to Earth. With a new surge of adrenaline flowing through him, Dante calmly walked to the control panel, grabbed the alien sitting there, and threw him across the room, knocking down three others with his landing. As he raised his sword and brought it down through the control panel, a loud bang and an array of sparks shot out. The aliens surged forward in an attempt to overwhelm him. He used everything he had left to break free and dive towards the machine itself. He knocked over parts, ripped out wires, and sliced everything he could get near. The explosions started immediately,

leaving little time for him to consider everything he'd done, and causing the aliens to panic and run in all directions. The last image in Dante's mind as everything exploded around him was of Gwen lying in a hospital bed holding their son. His eyes were wet as he whispered his final words.

"It's finally over."

* * *

"Dante Smith was a hero, not only to his family, but to the entire human race. He sacrificed his own life, so that we all might live free from the tyranny of an alien race. He will live on in the memories of those of us who were lucky enough to know him, as well as in the hearts of his wife, Gwen, and his newborn son, Duncan"

Gwen smiled as John stepped down from the podium, saluting the statue of Dante that had been erected in his honor as part of a memorial gravesite in Arlington National Cemetery. It had been nearly a year since she had lost Dante and, even though the pain was still a large part of her life, her son had helped to fill the sense of emptiness her husband's death had left. She arose from her seat, handed John the baby, and leaned her head softly against the statue.

"I will always love you, Dante. Nothing can ever change that. Not a day goes by that I don't run to the door everytime the doorbell rings, hoping against hope that its you. I just want you to know that our son will learn how great his father truly was." As Gwen whispered her words, tears ran down her cheeks. "I forgive you for leaving me alone. I know why you did it. I just wanted...I just wanted to say goodbye one last time. I love you."

Gwen reached up and kissed the statue. She wiped the tears from her eyes, gently took her son back from John, and walked quietly out of the cemetery and back to her life. She smiled and kissed her son as she entered the waiting car, feeling Dante's presence and knowing that, somewhere, somehow, he would always be with her, watching over her.

Alternate Ending

Following is my second idea for the ending. At first, I wanted this to be the original ending, but then after a lot of thought and discussion with friends, as well as an idea for a possible sequel, I decided to go a different route. However, I didn't want this ending to go forgotten, as it may turn up on a DVD someday, so I have attached it as an alternate ending. I've started the numbering of the pages with where it would fit in had it been the actual ending.

Alternate Ending

“Dante, you have to understand, it was for the betterment of mankind. I know that doesn’t sound like a viable reason to you right now, but you will understand.”

“I don’t want to understand, John. Whether you were there or not, you were part of a mission that’s only purpose was to experiment on innocent beings, and now you want me to make sure your past sins won’t continue to haunt you. I will make sure this ship blows up, but I’m not doing it to help you.”

John’s mind stopped. As he peered out into the next room, he saw a single alien creature clawing at the teleportation device. John grabbed his broken bayonet and leapt towards the alien. Dante’s eyes grew wide as he witnessed John’s throat getting slashed as he drove the bayonet into the alien’s chest. The alien and John both fell to the ground. The teleportation device was safe.

“John? John, are you okay? Did it cut you deep?” Dante frantically reached out for any type of response from his fallen comrade.

“Don’t...don’t worry about it, son. I saved the teleporter. You can still make it home.” John clutched his throat, trying to stem the outpouring of blood. “That thing must have made it away...away from the rest and snuck in here. I got it, though. I got it.”

“John, don’t let go. I can contact some medical personal and have them there immediately. Just hold on.”

John smiled and closed his eyes. “No, son. I’ve made a lot of mistakes in my life, and one just came back to get me, that’s all. Just let me die knowing that I saved your...your way home. Don’t feel sorry for me, son...it’s my time. Remember me by this...”

“John? Come on, there is someone on the way. You’ve got to...” Dante let his thoughts trail off, knowing that John was gone. “I will remember this, John. You can count on it.”

With a new surge of adrenaline flowing through him, Dante calmly walked to the control panel, grabbed the alien sitting there, and threw him across the room, knocking down three others with his landing. He paused long enough to mentally contact a scientist that was looking over the alien corpse next to John and confirm that the machine would be operational. Reassured, he raised his sword and brought it down through the control panel. A loud bang resonated through the ship, as an array of sparks shot out of the device. The aliens surged forward in an attempt to overwhelm him. He used everything he had left to break free and dive towards the machine itself. He knocked over parts, ripped out wires, and sliced everything he could get near. The explosions started immediately, causing the aliens to panic and run in all directions, and giving Dante a chance to mentally call for his portal home. As he ran past the scurrying aliens and dove into the portal, he felt something grab his leg. Realizing that now wasn’t the time to let his curious nature get the best of him, he continued his forward motion into Area 51’s teleportation room. Not allowing the scientists anytime to argue, he sliced his sword through the teleportation device, causing it to be shut down permanently.

Wondering why the scientists had yet to scold him, he picked himself up and faced them. “Look, I know it wasn’t my place to destroy your machine, but, trust me, it’s better for all of us this way.”

Continuing to stare silently, one of the scientists slowly bent down and pulled something off Dante’s leg. “What’s...what’s this? Whose arm is this?”

Dante froze in place, unable to decide between a feeling of fear and one of curiosity. “It can’t be. I cut his head off. I watched him die.”

The scientist looked at Dante with a confused glance. “What? Watched who die? Whose arm is this?”

“It doesn’t matter now. It’s finally over.” Dante began walking towards the elevator, leaving behind the scientist holding the mostly human arm. “Now where’s my wife?”

* * *

“Oh, Dante, he’s so beautiful. What do you want to name him?” Gwen smiled as she reached up and gently accepted her newborn son from the attending nurse. “How about John? That’s a good name.”

Dante closed his eyes, remembering his friend’s last words. “Yes it is. But how about we make that his middle name? I think John was always kind of partial to ‘Duncan.’”

“Duncan John Smith. I like that.” Gwen kissed her husband as she cradled the baby in her arms. “I know you don’t like to talk about the alien experience, but I don’t think I could have done this if you hadn’t made it back. I love you.”

“I made a promise to you that I had to keep. You know nothing could make me break that.” Dante smiled and softly took his son from his wife’s arms. “I love you, too, princess. I love both of you.”

Closing his eyes, Dante held his baby close and pictured John in his mind. He knew that he would never forget some of the atrocities John had played a part in, but he owed it to him to at least make sure everyone remembered the way he died—a hero.

Original Story for AP English

The following two pages are basically what began this whole process. As I mentioned in the abstract, the assignment was to write two pages starting with the words, "I went back." As you can see, the story and the character have both changed dramatically.

I went back about three feet, not fully comprehending what had just taken place. There was no reason or warning, just pure destruction. No one was left around me, at least no one that was alive. I had to be dreaming. It couldn't end like this, not in real life anyway. I half-expected to wake up any minute with everything back to normal, but I knew that was a foolish thought.

Suddenly, in the distance, I heard the buzzing coming towards me again. I knew there wouldn't be much time before it happened again, there never was. I had two choices. I could either stand my ground and show them that humans don't back down from anything, even though it would probably mean death, or I could run and hide in an attempt to gather information and round up the survivors, if there were any, for a final, all-out confrontation. I chose the latter. I held my breath and dove among the dead bodies. I was sure that they would leave the dead to rest, since there was no point in attacking something that was dead already. I waited for what seemed like years, trying to force myself to stay silent and motionless, even though both my heart and my stomach urged me to move on. With lights flashing hypnotically and the strange buzzing making my head pound, I held my breath and tried to remember what the world was like before this atrocity. Suddenly, without warning, all the motion stopped. I could still hear the buzzing, but the lights were focused on one spot, just a few yards in front of my current position. The only thing that I could think at that moment was that they had somehow found me. My heart stopped and I felt like my whole body was going to shut down. I

looked over at one of the bodies in the pit and noticed that there was some type of laser weapon in his hand. I slowly extended my hand, making sure not to make any sudden movements or noise. If they were about to discover me, I was going to make sure to take a few of them out before my death.

My fears were soon put to rest, though, at least for now, when the motions started up again just as suddenly as they had stopped. Finally, they passed over and headed back to whatever god-forsaken planet they had came from. I got up and started moving, not knowing exactly where I was going, but adamant in my desire for revenge. I wouldn't have much time before they came back to finish their job, maybe a couple of hours at the most, but I would be ready this time.

I have read enough comic books and watched enough movies to know what happens next. Someone always gathers up any survivors, finds some kind of secret weapon to use, and throws together a last-ditch defense and usually forces the enemy to leave or be set back in some way. That wasn't going to happen this time, though. This wasn't going to be a final defense, it was going to be all-out war. I didn't want to make them leave or be set back, they were going to pay for what they had done. They were going to pay with their lives. No matter what it took, they would regret ever ending a single human life. It may take a while to get our resources together, but when we do, nothing will be able to keep us from completely destroying them. They may have underestimated us and think that they have won, but they will learn that the underdog always rises to the occasion.

Original Short Story for English 405

This is the short story that grew from the original two pages. Writing this short story is what gave me the idea to expand it into a novella. As you can see, the character and story had changed a little from the two pages, even though they are included as the ending. Some of the names also were changed in the novella. For instance, Dante's wife changed from Alisha to Gwen, for no other reason than I liked that name better. The other main difference is the voice, which changed from first person to third.

ENDGAME

"I've been feeling this way for three weeks. I can't explain it, but I've been getting visions of all sorts of awful things," I said as Alisha rubbed her tender hands through my cold, black hair.

"Sweetie, you've got to calm down. You're making yourself sick, and I'm worried about you. You haven't eaten for days. You're starting to lose those love handles," she replied, with what can only be described as care in her eyes.

I laid there for a few seconds, letting everything soak in. My head was pounding, and my eyes were bloodshot. I could tell that was what was bothering Alisha the most. She always loved looking into my "light blue eyes" that she would always call "enchanted." It's not that I didn't want to sleep. Believe me, that was top on my list of things to do. However, the visions in my head wouldn't allow it. Everytime I shut my eyes, I would see people dying, gunshots pounding, and some strange sorts of creatures savagely destroying my home. The dreams and visions were like watching Independence Day, except they were more graphic and, of course, I'm not Will Smith. I guess other than the fact that I'm about 5'10", 200 lbs., and white, we could almost be twins. I liked to think we had a lot in common, though. I have a pretty good sense of humor, and I'm not without my own acting abilities. Sure, I've only been in one poorly directed romance film, but it is still enough to call myself an actor. It won't matter soon, though, because Universal has promised me a three screen-play contract. I can't believe I'm finally going

to be a writer after all these years of sacrificing. I may just get to do a little acting in one or more of these things, too.

With that thought, the visions started again. This time was different, though. This time they were worse, harsher, more frightening. I knew the routine, and I knew that Alisha was going to freak out, but I was too far along to do anything about it.

“Honey, why are you shaking? Dante, your eyes! They...they’re rolling back...oh God, what’s wrong! Please...Please...be ok. I love you!” screamed Alisha.

“The moon....they...they’re...coming...” was all I could manage to get out before I lost consciousness, unaware of whether I would ever wake up or not.

The next few days were a blur. In fact, I’m not even sure I was conscious for more than an hour combined. When I finally did regain my composure enough to remember what was going on, I realized that I wasn’t in my Miami home anymore. With a quick glance around the room, taking in everything I could, I realized I was in a hospital bed, with Alisha next to me asleep in the chair. I hated to wake her up, but something inside me was telling me that there were worse things on the horizon than a sleep-deprived wife.

“Lisha, sweets, wake up. We need to get out of here, they’re coming,” I said, gently squeezing her hand, which was entangled with my own.

As she slowly lifted her head, and turned to face me, with her long, flowing blonde hair bouncing around her slightly tanned, smooth face, I had no doubt what she would say to me. If I wanted to get out of here, I was going to have to prove to her what I was feeling and seeing was real.

“Oh, okay, no problem. Hey, I’ll go tell the nurse that you want to leave. I’m sure they’ll have you packed and out of here pretty quickly, since you’ve only been having seizures for a few weeks,” said Alisha pointedly.

“Well, someone has been watching Comedy Central, haven’t they? Come on, Lisha, they’re not seizures. Not exactly. I didn’t know how to explain it before, but now,

for some reason, I know what I have to do. Here, give me your hand...feel what I feel,” I said, grabbing her hand and placing it upon my sweating brow.

I watched her eyes widen, and her breath stop as she was bombarded with images of death and pain, of hate and fear. I hated to put her through this, but I knew it was the only way. After only a few seconds, she jerked her hand back, and held it up to her eyes. I thought it best to keep quiet for a minute, so that she could allow the seriousness of the situation to completely sink in. Before I had the chance to comfort her and try to explain things a little better, she jumped up and sprinted out of the room.

“Crap,” I thought to myself. “There went my best chance of getting out of here. Well, no sense in wasting time, I’m leaving now.”

I rolled out of bed, tenderly, and tore the IV out of my skin, cringing in pain the entire time. After many unsuccessful attempts at reaching my clothes in the closet, most of them ending in my falling down, I managed to get dressed. Just as I was about to walk out the door, however, Alisha came back through.

“Where are you going in such a hurry, sport?” she asked.

“Well, I thought you left, so I was going to leave on my own. What’s the deal? Where did you go?” I shot back.

“I went to talk the doctors into letting you go. It took some work, but I convinced them that I could take care of you at home. I’m not sure what to think about what happened when I touched you, but I know it’s not normal. If living with you has taught me anything, it’s that when you say something is serious, you mean it. Let’s go,” she said.

I smiled, and put my arm around her, although it was more of a sign of my needing help to walk, than a symbol of our love. I knew that she was hurting inside, even though she wasn’t letting it show through. Any other time, I would hold her in my arms, tell her everything was going to be all right, and let the world around us fade away to nothingness. This time, though, I was afraid that there was a chance that it actually could

fade away.

After a long, quiet car ride, we finally arrived at home. Without giving a thought to Alisha, I ran inside and called the same person I always called in times of crisis. After cutting through the unbelievable amount of red tape involved in calling a US Senator, I finally was able to prove my identity and talk to my friend, Senator John Davidson.

“John, you are going to think I’m crazy, but you have to hear me out. I have been having these visions and dreams for weeks now, but in the past few days they’ve gotten clearer...and scarier. I think that something is going to happen that is going to cause the deaths of a lot of people, and I think it’s going to happen soon,” I said, half-expecting him to laugh at me and hang up.

“A threat to the American way of life, eh, Dante? Why is it that you only call when there is something dire about to happen. What is it this time, more terrorists?” replied John, in complete seriousness

“Yeah, I guess I am becoming a bearer of bad news,” I said. “No, not terrorists. Don’t laugh, okay, but I think it’s aliens. I know it sounds ridiculous...”

“What did you say? Aliens? Dante, I will be there in half an hour. Don’t go anywhere,” he said, interrupting me mid-sentence, and hung up.

Now I was thoroughly confused. A United States Senator had just dropped everything he was doing to come check out the ramblings of a two-bit actor. Sure, I was his friend, and we’d been through a war together, but something wasn’t right. Something was going on here, and I was starting to get the feeling that I wasn’t the only one who was feeling that way. At least I had half an hour to rest before John arrived. I planned to take full advantage of that. At least that’s the last thing I thought before I was hit with the most powerful vision I’ve ever had. The last thing I remembered before passing out was seeing Alisha’s broken body on top of a stack of burning, rotting flesh.

“Okay, you have got to stop doing this. Dante, wake up. Come on, honey. John’s been here for fifteen minutes, and he has something important to talk to you

about,” Alisha said, rubbing my shoulders in a relaxing, rhythmic motion.

“I’m up. I’m sorry. That was the worst one. John. Where’s John? You said he was here,” I asked, in a dazed state.

“He is here. He’s sitting at the table in the den. He has some kind of briefcase with him, and he hasn’t said more than two words his entire time here. Listen, I know you won’t tell me what’s going on, so I’m not even going to ask. I just found out that mom is sick, so I’m going to head into Tampa to be with her and dad. You do what you have to do, and get ahold of me when you’re done,” Alisha said.

“Normally, I’d argue with you, but I think it’s better if you do go stay with your parents. I want you to be careful, though. I promise this will all be over soon. Then we can live the life we deserve,” I said.

We kissed, and I watched as the woman I love walked out of the room, and then out of the house, and I didn’t know when or if I’d ever see her again. At least I wouldn’t have to worry about her as much, with her parents taking care of her for the time being. I still couldn’t shake the images of that last vision, though. I sat there for a few minutes, trying to clear my head and gather my thoughts, before heading downstairs to find out just how serious everything was. Just as I was about to head down, I was hit with a strange desire to change my clothes. Feeling like I’d questioned myself enough lately, I decided to give in and went to the closet. I quickly put on my old Northpeak cargo jeans, and laced up my lucky Jordans. I pulled out my Cincinnati Reds home jersey, which had seen me through some pretty tough situations, but when I was about to put it on, for some reason, I looked down at the kevlar vest on the floor. It was left over from my short stint as a secret service agent, and since it wasn’t very thick, I decided to slip it on underneath my plain black T-shirt and Reds jersey. Once I got completely dressed, I walked downstairs and into the den, where John was staring blankly at an open file folder.

“John, there’s more going on here than what meets the eye, isn’t there. I mean, no matter how much you trust me, there is no way you’d drop everything just at my word

over the phone. What is going on?" I asked.

"Dante, it's bad this time. I don't even know if we can make it through what's coming up. Here, read this. This will help you explain it much quicker and easier than I can," he said, as he handed me the file.

On the outside of the folder was the words "Top Security Clearance," so I knew that if I was allowed to see this, that I wasn't going to like what was inside. I slowly opened the folder and immediately noticed a strange picture on the very first page. It looked exactly like the flying crafts that would fly over the bodies in my dreams. Things didn't get any better when I turned the page to see one of the body of one of the aliens from the visions on an autopsy table. I noticed that John was staring at me, and when I looked up with a questioning glance, he nodded his head silently and covered his face with his hands.

"I know, Dante. Keep going. You'll have more questions to ask after you're finished. I did."

The fear made his voice tremble, which didn't do much for my desire to continue leafing through the file. After going over the alien picture from every angle, I turned the page and continued to leaf through the file. Most of the rest of it was report after report of where the alien came from, and why it was kept secret. The reasons why it was kept secret all made sense. I agreed that no one really needed to know, and that even the slightest leak would have caused mobs of irrational, scared people to riot. The thing that didn't make any sense to me was where it came from. There seemed to be too many answers for it. Almost as if they could pinpoint the exact location of its home planet. To me, that meant that they knew a lot more than they should. It also meant that there was a lot more to this situation than I first thought.

"John, what's going on? How do you know where this thing came from?"

"You realize that once I tell you this, then you will be completely in the middle of this, and the likelihood of you having a normal life again isn't very good."

“John, I’ve been a part of this from the beginning. The bottom line is that with these visions and dreams, I don’t have a normal life anyway. Now answer me. How do you know where this thing came from? Why am I having the visions?” I asked, knowing I wouldn’t like the answers.

“Very well. First, I want you to forget everything you’ve heard about Roswell and Area 51. There were no flying saucers crash landing, and there were no aliens. That much of the government’s cover story is true. However, there was a UFO in the area. NASA and the military were testing our new spacecraft. We didn’t test it on Earth, though,” John stopped and stood up, his eyes never leaving mine.

“What kind of spacecraft was it? Where did you test it?”

“Contrary to scientific belief, this craft was capable of traveling faster than the speed of light. Basically, a device built into the craft had the ability to open a small warpzone, and then close it again after the craft went through. This way, the craft could travel from one side of space to the other with hardly any time passing, either on Earth or for the craft,” John stopped again, ran his hand through his hair, and sighed. “During the test run, we lost contact with the ship for hours. Then, without warning, the ship reappeared out of a warpzone just outside the Earth’s atmosphere, and crash landed.”

“That’s amazing, but you still haven’t told me why I’m having visions or where the aliens come in.”

“We sent two astronauts on the mission, Greta Williams and...”

I stood up, nearly knocking the table over in the process, “and Conner Smith...my father, right?”

“...Yes. The woman came back pregnant and immediately went into labor when we found them. It wasn’t your father’s child, though. It couldn’t have been. She wasn’t pregnant when she went up, and when she came back down...she gave birth to the thing you saw in that picture,” John said, rubbing both hands over his eyes and then placing one on my shoulder. “We ran a number of test on your father, and found nothing wrong.

When you were born, though, you had a strange strand of DNA in your genetic code. There was nothing we could do about it, and we didn't think it would cause any problems, so we didn't tell your parents. During the time you were in the hospital, though, we found out that your DNA had changed...slightly."

"No. You...why didn't you tell me? How could you let me go on living thinking I'm normal? The visions...they're not...they're real, aren't they? Somehow...somehow...the aliens are making contact through me. I can feel it now. They're really coming, aren't they."

"Yes. Your wife told us what you said about the moon just before you went into the hospital. We checked it out, and there are hundreds of spacecraft, almost identical to ours, hovering a few hundred miles away from the moon. I'm sorry we didn't tell you. I didn't even know until this morning. You have to understand...we didn't know...the government didn't know. Listen, there is a private jet at the airport. It leaves for New Mexico in an hour. Please...be on it."

"Wait...New Mexico...I thought you said there wasn't an Area 51?"

"Technically there's not. At least not the way the rumors describe it. It isn't there just for this purpose, we had used it for many years before we even began building a spacecraft. You will see, you'll understand. I will leave you alone to think. Meet me at the plane," John paused. "Dante...I really am sorry."

I nodded my head, and watched as he walked out the door. I stood there for about 15 minutes after his car drove off, just thinking and praying about what I was going to do. I wasn't trying to decide whether or not to meet him at the airport, that decision was made even before John asked the question. I was just wondering if things would ever go back to normal, or at least what passed for normal in my life. I stopped myself from going any further with that line of thinking. It was time to bring this thing to a close somehow. It was obvious that I wasn't helping anyone by standing around and thinking, so I went, grabbed my car keys, and started the odyssey to the airport. I don't know if

there wasn't any traffic, or if I was just too caught up in those secret files to notice. I still couldn't believe what John told me. How could I be different from a normal human? It didn't make any sense, but, at the same time, it explained so much. Maybe that's why I was so athletic and smart. I'm not saying I'm an Einstein, but now that I think about it, it seems like I always have an answer when I need one. After this is over, I'm going to get all my questions answered, whether the government likes it or not.

When I arrived at the airport, it didn't take a genius to figure out which plane I was supposed to get on. Even without John standing at the foot of the boarding stairs, the plane was covered with American flags and NASA symbols. It kind of struck me as funny that we would take such an obvious governmental plane for such a supposedly secret mission.

"John, is everything all set?" I asked. "I mean, I can always go grab a Big Mac if you need some more time to fuel up the plane or something."

"I'm glad to see you can keep your sense of humor, Dante. I hope that I have the opportunity to laugh if...when we get through this," John said.

I'd never heard such seriousness in his voice. He'd never really been one to joke around, but usually he would at least smile at my attempts.

"Welcome aboard, gentlemen. We will be arriving at the base in just under two hours," the co-pilot said, as he showed us to our seats.

Once we had our seatbelts on and our trays locked in the full, upright position, the plane took off.

"Hey, John, do we get an in-flight movie?" I asked, hoping to lighten the mood a little.

"Dante, I think you..." John stopped, as the plane began to shake.

"Don't worry, man, it's just turbul..."

My voice trailed off, once I noticed that the sky had turned black and the plane had begun to slant downwards. I could hear the commotion in the cockpit, as both the

pilot and co-pilot frantically worked to bring it back up to level. Just as they had us leveling off, a bright flash filled the sky and something hit the plane. Another flash filled the dark sky and the plane began falling downward at a much greater speed than before. I looked over at John, hoping to hear some words of encouragement, but, instead, finding out that he was unconscious. The last thing I remember before blacking out, myself, was the disturbing sight of John's left eye popping out of his head and dangling precariously on his bloody cheek, and wondering if the same was going to happen to me.

After what had to be hours, I began gaining some semblance of consciousness again. I slowly opened my eyes and rubbed my hands along my face, both to check for blood and to make sure I hadn't lost anything. With a quick glance around, I noticed that John had been decapitated by the crash, and the pilot and co-pilot were nowhere to be seen. I remembered enough from war training to know not to make any sudden movements in this type of situation, so after slowly pulling myself from the wreckage, I slid over to a large pile of rubble and pulled myself to a near-standing position. Despite all my training never to show emotions on the battlefield, I couldn't keep myself from screaming at what I saw all around me. It was like the visions had all come true. Our plane had just made it about a mile past the airport when it went down, so I could still see clearly the airport, or more accurately, where the airport used to be.

After a through search around the airport, I decided that it was safe enough to try to head back to my house. Maybe I could get ahold of Alisha and tell her to get out of Florida while she had the chance. I still hadn't seen what knocked down the plane, but there was no question that it was something of alien design. After searching in vain for a mode of transportation, I decided that running was going to be the next best option. I didn't have time to get very far before I heard a strange buzzing noise coming from the East. Realizing that whatever was making the noise probably wasn't going to be friendly, I ran to a thicket of bushes and laid down. I tried to look out from under my hiding spot, but to no avail. I could, however, hear the noise growing louder and louder, and then

stopping. When it stopped, a different noise began, sounding a little like doors opening from above. After a few minutes, the thing finally buzzed off, and I rolled out to the street. I looked around the immediate area but didn't notice anything different from before. I did smell something, though. Once again my battle training helped me out, and I realized that the smell was a dead body, or as I saw when I turned towards the city, hundreds of thousands of dead bodies.

I went back about three feet, not fully comprehending the horrid sights before me. I prayed that it was just another, more vivid vision, but I knew that it wasn't. There was no way it could end like this, not in real life anyway. In the distance, I heard the buzzing coming towards me again. I knew there wouldn't be much time before it arrived to the area I was standing, and I also knew that I couldn't hide in the bushes forever, because they would eventually check them. I realized that I had two choices. I could either stand my ground and show them that I wouldn't back down from anything, or I could hide where they probably wouldn't look. The first choice was basically suicide, so I tossed my pride aside and sprinted towards the nearest pile of dead bodies. I held my breath and dove in, hoping that I'd be able to hold my lunch, as well. I was fairly sure they would leave the dead to rest, since there was no point in attacking something that was already defeated.

I waited patiently, trying to force myself to stay silent and motionless, even though both my heart and my stomach urged me to move on. With lights flashing hypnotically and the strange buzzing making my head pound, I breathed only short, sparing breaths, and tried to remember what the world was like before this atrocity. I could hear the craft stop almost directly overhead, and saw a beam of light focus on one spot, just a few yards in front of me. The only thing that I could think at that moment was that they had somehow found me. My fears were soon put to rest, though, at least for now, when the motions started up again and the craft or crafts passed over and headed off into the distance. After a few minutes of waiting to see if they would come back, I

got up and started moving, not knowing exactly where I was going but adamant in my desire for revenge. I knew I wouldn't have much time before they came back to finish their job, so I had to get everything in gear and try to plan out some way of doing this alone.

I've read enough comic books and watched enough science fiction movies to know what happens next. The hero always gathers up a rag-tag group of survivors and finds some sort of secret weapon that sends the attackers back to their home planet to plan a new attack someday for the sequel. That wasn't going to happen this time, though. This wasn't just going to be some last-ditch defense, this was going to be all-out war. I had a feeling that Alisha was dead, so I had nothing to lose. No matter what it takes, I'll win this war. It may take a while to get everything together and to find enough survivors to make any difference, but nothing will be able to keep me from completely destroying them. They drew first blood and won the first battle, but we're going to win the war. It's not really a matter of how, just a matter of when.